

Title of Report:	Asylum Dispersal Funding
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure and Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	18 November 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
Lead Officer	Head of Community & Culture

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	TBC

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£94,204 (100% funded by TEO)
Included in Current Year Estimates	NO
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	1041/30186
Staffing Costs	£ nil net cost

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/ <u>No</u>	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide an update to Members on dispersal of asylum seekers in the CCGBC area.

To seek approval for the action plan relating to the Home Office sponsored dispersal programme for councils across Northern Ireland, supporting the development of networks and initiatives that facilitate integration into local communities.

2.0 Background

Previous reports to council provided members with information on:

- The dispersal of people seeking Asylum across Northern Ireland and the use of two hotels as emergency contingency accommodation and private rented dispersal accommodation within the council area, provided through the Mears Group, who have been contracted by the Home Office to deliver same.
- Home Office sponsored funding provided to Councils via The Executive Office, for the establishment of networks for assistance and integration of those seeking Asylum within local communities.

2.1 Accommodation

Whilst the Home Office instructed the closure of hotels UK wide, some hotels continue to operate as a necessity in the absence of alternative emergency accommodation. Three hotels in Northern Ireland continue to function as contingency accommodation, including the Magherabouy Hotel in Portrush which continues to be used as family accommodation. The Rambler Inn in Portstewart is no longer in operation as contingency accommodation, and Mears handed back the hotel in August 2025. The use of existing dispersal accommodation across the region, including the CCGBC area will continue however, there is currently no requirement for Mears to procure additional properties in the CCGBC.

2.2 Dispersal Funding

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have previously received funding from the Asylum Dispersal and Refugee Integration funding programmes, administered by the Executive Office, to address priority needs by developing and delivering support initiatives and signposting services to those requiring information and relevant services applicable to their asylum seeker status. The funding included support to establish and/or build upon the necessary networks and infrastructure within local communities and provide support to groups to minimise any potential impact on resources available to support local communities.

3.0 Asylum Dispersal Funding 2025/26

A meeting was held with all councils by The Executive Office and The Home Office on 9 October 2025, at which further dispersal funding for all Northern Ireland councils was confirmed, with no match funding required. Councils are requested to submit action plans outlining initiatives to meet the priority needs of asylum seekers and refugees in their area. Plans must include ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) provision and the establishment of a local support/information hubs.

3.1 Review

Over the past three years, working with key statutory agencies and community stakeholders, councils have developed a comprehensive understanding of the priority actions needed to support asylum seekers and refugees.

These actions span the entire settlement pathway, including:

- Provision of support to individuals residing in hotel accommodation.

- Continued assistance during transitions to dispersal accommodation.
- Targeted interventions upon receipt of a Home Office asylum decision.

While dispersal accommodation will remain a core component of the system, future new arrivals will no longer benefit from the centralised orientation model previously provided within the hotel infrastructure. This change signals the potential for a significant shift in support needs and requires proactive planning to ensure continuity and equity in service provision.

Council officers in collaboration with community and statutory service providers carried out a review of existing strategies to focus on emerging needs, safeguard vulnerable individuals during transition phases, and reinforce community integration frameworks.

This process facilitated a shared understanding of:

- The evolving needs of individuals and families navigating the asylum process.
- Existing resources and service capabilities within the borough.
- Critical gaps that hinder equitable access and effective support

Collaborative action informed the development and delivery of new services and targeted interventions to date. However, in recognition of ongoing changes to the asylum landscape it remains essential to continually develop the local support infrastructure.

3.2 Action Plan

In line with Council's Asylum Dispersal framework approved in June 2023, the following priority actions have been identified to address emerging challenges and further develop relevant support services at a local level. The actions continue to seek to embed and promote collaborative efforts at a local level, while providing a range of activities which ensure relevant support is available to those placed within the borough. All areas of expenditure will be subject to 100% funding from The NI Executive Office.

- 3.2.1 **Staff Resource:** To effectively coordinate and implement the Asylum Dispersal Action Plan, it is recommended that a dedicated part-time staff resource be established. This role would support the planning, coordination, and delivery of the action plan across the CCGBC area, ensuring that existing council services and resources are not unduly impacted.
- 3.2.2 **Statutory and Community Engagement:** Successful delivery of the action plan depends on strong collaboration and shared understanding across statutory and community partners. Council will continue to facilitate the statutory and community working group, support the Northern Health & Social Care Trust's Wellbeing Hub group, and participate in the cross-council engagement forum coordinated by TEO and the Home Office.
- 3.2.3 **Orientation Information:** Providing accessible, accurate, and multilingual information for individuals placed in dispersal accommodation within the borough is essential for effective integration. It is proposed that up to date local information and service details be made available at key community sites and online. In addition to written materials, regular in-person events and support hubs are encouraged to help reduce isolation, foster community connections, support language practice, and promote volunteering and befriending opportunities.
- 3.2.4 **Cultural Awareness:** In response to recent regional challenges, there is a recognised need to strengthen mutual understanding and promote positive community relations. Training initiatives will therefore be developed to support both new arrivals and local partners to include:

- Information sessions on local customs, civic responsibilities, community safety, and safeguarding will help promote confidence and understanding of life in Northern Ireland.
- Ongoing cultural awareness and inclusion training will aim to enhance understanding, address misconceptions, and support welcoming and safe community interactions.

3.2.5 Local Integration: The rural nature of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough presents practical challenges for people seeking asylum in accessing key services such as legal advice, which are often concentrated in urban areas. Limited transport options can further affect access to appointments and services, impacting wellbeing. Community and voluntary organisations play an essential role in supporting inclusion, though many rely on volunteers and limited resources. Sustainable funding for wellbeing and integration activities will help strengthen local capacity, ensuring continued inclusive support and long-term community cohesion.

3.2.6 Health and Wellbeing: People arriving through the asylum process may have experienced significant hardship and disruption. Supporting positive physical and mental wellbeing is therefore a key priority. Initiatives that promote inclusion, build resilience, and encourage participation in community life will be developed in partnership with local organisations and health providers.

3.2.7 Language Development: English language learning is a cornerstone of successful integration. Formal ESOL classes support communication, confidence, and social connection. In addition, opportunities for informal language learning for adults and children will be explored, including bilingual family activities and accessible educational resources. These initiatives can help families maintain structure and engagement while fostering connections within local communities.

The action plan for the CCGBC continues to contribute to the key outcomes as identified in The Executive Office draft Integration Strategy.

3.3 Summary

Activities and associated resources (subject to confirmation of funding from TEO).

Staff Resource	Part-time, temporary officer to deliver Action Plan.
Community & Statutory Engagement	Regular engagement with key service providers to identify current and changing needs. Continue facilitation of the working group Continue engagement in cross council meetings with TEO and Home Office.
Orientation/Information provision	Website, social media and other relevant promotion signposting and key information. Information Events for stakeholders and community organisations to engage with new arrivals and promote services. Assist the setup of a local community based support hub / drop-in in a central location for asylum seekers to access community

	sector services such as foodbank, clothing bank, counselling/trauma support, local information packs etc.
Cultural Awareness	Programme for asylum seekers temporarily placed within the Borough which increase awareness of local culture and practices including legal, social and civic responsibilities, community safety, and safeguarding principles specific to life in Northern Ireland. Cultural awareness training for local service providers to update and increase their knowledge of asylum processes.
Local Integration	Support for and signposting asylum seekers in accessing essential appointments. Resources to support groups with community integration initiatives that support local people and asylum seekers to engage positively.
Health & Wellbeing	Assist community & voluntary groups to offer culturally appropriate activities which support positive mental and physical health for individuals experiencing the trauma and severe stress of being displaced.
Language Development	Continued provision for language classes and other developmental initiatives that improve English language skills and integration (ESOL, books etc.)
Total amount requested	£94,204

4.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Council approves the action plan contained within the report, subject to funding from The Executive Office's Dispersal Funding programme for councils.